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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday March 12, 1941

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOMES THAT GO UP IN SMOKE." Information from the Farm Security Administration. U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Does a house burn UP, or DOWN? That's a silly question, isn't it? 'Because either way you don't have a house! It's a dreadful thing to lose everything you have worked for for years in a fire. Records show that an average of more than 700 American homes are damaged or destroyed every day by fire. What's worse, an average of 20 people a day die in fires or as a result of fires. Last year on American farms alone, 3,500 men, women, and children lost their lives, and 4,500 others were injured or disfigured for life.

Millions of our hard-earned dollars go up in smoke each year too. Every thirteen minutes every day, somebody's farm has a fire. Fires cost the Nation's farmers \$150,000,000 a year. Many of these farmers are low-income people who "can't afford" fires. They are often folk who thought they couldn't afford to make simple home repairs, and later found they couldn't afford not to. The amazing thing about fires is that 85 percent of them could be prevented --- they are the result of somebody's neglect or carelessness.

Today the Farm Security Administration reports on farm fires and methods of preventing them suggested to its borrower families. Preventing a fire, you know, is by far the best precaution. Once a fire has started, it's 'mighty' hard to stop it. In the country, you don't listen for the sirens to scream and the fire engines to clang up and help you. You just hear the roar and crackle of the flames burning up everything you own.

The most common cause of fires is defective or overheated flues and chimneys, and this is something we can avoid. Every chimney should rest on a

solid fireproof foundation, and be built from the ground up, if possible. Chimneys should be kept clean and inspected for cracks or crevices. Stovepipes should be kept clean, too. Wood makes a soot that burns easily and if it isn't cleaned out it may burn out - and in doing so, burn you out. See that stovepipes never run through clothes closets or attics.

Legless stoves and ranges should never set directly on wooden floors. They are too likely to burn a hole in the wood and start a fire. Set them on a brick or concrete base. Under the other stoves put an asbestos pad or metal sheet, and put one behind them too if they are very near the wall. Set oil stoves firmly so they won't topple over. Never put a wood box near a stove, or a waste-basket near a stove to toss burned matches into. Don't put clothes or shoes or kindling or other things in the oven to dry, or hang clothing over a hot stove. Always empty ashes outside the house in a metal container - never a wooden or pasteboard box.

People should be careful how they STAND too close to a hot stove, too, or in front of an open grate or fireplace. In Virginia, a high school girl was dusting a mantel over an open fireplace, when her little "gone-with-the wind" skirt caught fire and she burned to death. In Oregon, a couple of youngsters were "toasting their toes" in front of a fireplace, when their little nighties caught fire and they were burned severely. Every fireplace and grate should have a screen before it, so no one will forget and stand too close, and so coals and sparks won't fall out on the rug or carpet.

In spite of all the talk about matches, and all the tombstones that have been erected to people who were careless with them, we still hear of the deaths they cause. We should keep matches out of the reach of children, also of pets, and pests like mice and rats. They should be kept in metal, closed containers, and burned matches should be thrown into little metal or earthen containers too.

Don't hang away clothes with matches in the pocket - and, incidentally, strike-on-the-box matches are safer in pockets than strike-anywhere matches. Matches, you know, have heads but no brains, and the users must supply the brains.

Lots of farm families still use coal oil, or kerosene, lamps. When they do, they should be careful not to set them near curtains or on rickety, wobbly tables where they will upset, or on table covers that the youngsters can pull to the floor. The safest lamp is really a metal one with a large base so it won't turn over, glass ones may break - Keep wicks trimmed level and see that wicks and burners fit tight. Don't make lampshades from things that burn, like cloth or paper. Never leave a lamp burning with no one in the house. Parents who lock up youngsters with lighted lamps should be locked up themselves.

Fires sometimes start themselves, "spontaneous combustion" we call it. For example, oil mops and rags, paint cloths, and greasy overalls all tossed together in a small closet or dark corner generate heat and may burst into flame. These household articles should be kept in tight metal containers, or washed and hung up to dry, or stored in airy, roomy places.

Keep trash and rubbish cleared away - especially in the attic or cellar, or near stoves and stovepipes. Piles of litter make a wonderful breeding place for the "Firebug". Dust-laden cobwebs are fire traps too--which doesn't mean "dust your cobwebs." Also a mouse trap may catch a mouse and hold it, but a fire trap only catches a-fire and scatters it!

Remember this is the time of year when you can expect some electrical storms, so check up on the lightning rods and see that the telephone and radio arresters are in good condition. Get new ones if necessary - they are cheap, but you never heard of a cheap fire. Also be prepared for the little cold snaps this Spring, when you'll want to start up the fire to take the chill off the house. This is a temptation to get careless.

Even with care and precaution, a fire may still break out. For this kind of emergency, it's well to be prepared. Keep a long ladder convenient, also an axe and a bucket or two nearby, and maybe a box of sand in case of oil fire. Some communities have worked out little fire signals among themselves to notify each other of fires, and they quickly form a bucket brigade.

Have the members of your family trained on what to do in case of fire. You might start a room-to-room canvas, trying to find fire hazards. You could announce a fire-prevention week too and use as your slogan, "Safety first, last and always" and appoint every child a fire inspector. While we're talking about national defense, you can organize a little home defense program. You see, the next house that burns may not be SOMEBODY ELSE'S!

